

Excerpt from *Successful Coaching* (3rd ed.)

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THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD OFFENSE

Winning programs are ones that create a positive team culture around the philosophy of preventive discipline, and the cliché “The best defense is a good offense” expresses what that is about. Take the following six offensive steps to defend against disciplinary problems and to make the most of your upcoming season.

Step 1: Create the Right Team Culture

Nothing is more important in creating the right team culture than caring about your players, caring based on kindness but also firmness. Players quickly discern that you care when you

- take the time to learn who they are on and off the field;
- listen to them and take their viewpoints seriously;
- believe in them and let them know they are an important part of the team;
- encourage them to see mistakes as opportunities to learn; and
- respect them enough to involve them in team decision making.



When your players feel cared about, they are much more likely to cooperate than misbehave. When high school players were asked why they liked a coach, they replied, “Because he respects us, he listens to us, and he likes coaching.”

Step 2: Hold Team Meetings

Here are some good reasons for team meetings.

- Team meetings can provide your players with information that will help them be better athletes.
- Team meetings are valuable opportunities to discuss important character education issues.
- The team meeting is the appropriate place to develop the consequences for violations of team rules.
- Team meetings are also valuable for problem solving. If team practices are uninspired, see if you can root out the reason through a constructive conversation with your players.
- Team meetings are wonderful opportunities to exchange compliments and appreciations.

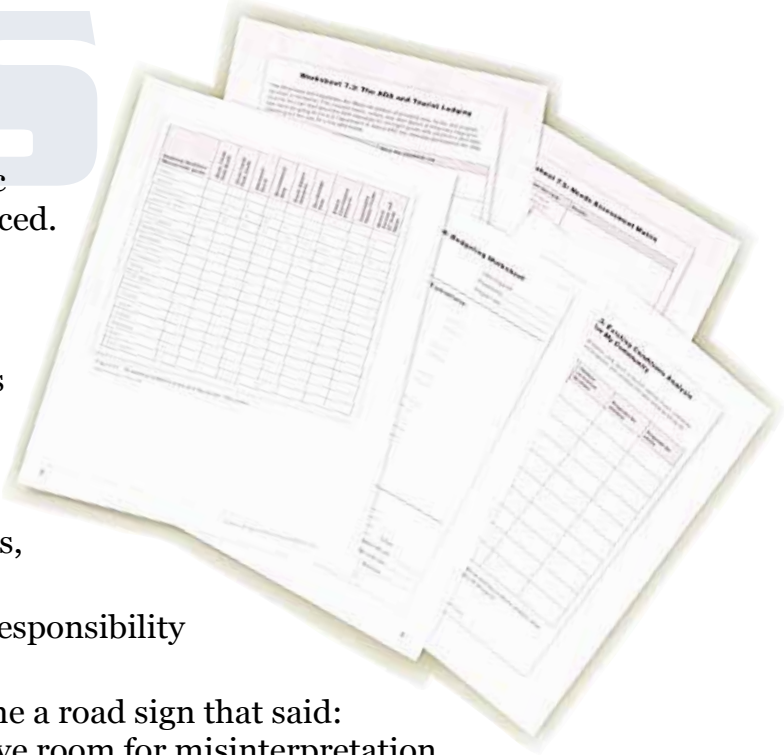


Step 3: Develop Team Rules

An essential part of preventive discipline is providing players with guidance on appropriate and inappropriate behavior and their responsibilities as members of the team. Below are some practical rules about making rules, and for even more information on crafting team policies, check out ASEP's *Coaches' Guide to Team Policies*.

RULES

- Rules are best when they describe specific behaviors that can be observed and enforced. Unenforceable rules will not be taken seriously by athletes.
- Develop a list of rules that are needed to govern team behavior, but keep the list as brief as possible.
- State rules in positive terms, defining what players ought to do, not just what to avoid. Rules such as “No shirt, no shoes, no service” are a turnoff to many people.
- Rules should reflect mutual respect and responsibility between you and your players.
- Rules should be specific and clear. Imagine a road sign that said: Drive at a prudent speed. Vague rules leave room for misinterpretation.
- Rules and responsibilities should serve your players, not vice versa. Players are less likely to follow rules that they see as stupid or punitive. Rules should be created for a good reason, not just because you said so.



Step 4: Create Team Routines

There is value in creating routines; they let players know what to do in certain situations and can help build team spirit. Routines also reduce the time you must spend instructing and supervising your players. Players are more likely to misbehave when they don't know what to do. But be careful not to create so many routines that are so specific in what you expect of the players that they are offensive to them and deny them the opportunity to be responsible for themselves. Here is a list of some routines that may be helpful for your team:

- Prepractice locker room routines
- Prepractice practice
- Starting practice
- Transitioning from one activity to another
- After-practice locker room routines
- Precontest routines
- Postcontest routines
- Travel routines



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ROUTINES

Step 5: Conduct Exciting Practices

Players who are bored will make their own entertainment. If your players are enjoying practice, they are far less inclined to misbehave. Practices can be exciting, interesting, and fun—and at the same time much more productive. Here's how.

- **Replace drills with games.** An overemphasis on drilling can result in demotivated athletes. Try replacing drills with gamelike activities that are more enjoyable and more relevant to learning to play the game well. The games approach is a great way to master the technical and tactical skills of the sport using modified games.

- **Create well-thought-out practice plans.** Design practices to make it fun for the players by varying methods and having a sense of how long to work on one activity before switching to another. Also design practices so everyone stays busy; practices in which players are standing in long lines waiting their turns not only invite misbehavior but also steal valuable practice time from the players.

- **Teach skills using progressions.** Players who fail repeatedly become discouraged, and as their motivation wanes, they may begin to misbehave. By teaching skills using progressions that are appropriate for each player, your players will experience more success and enjoy learning.

- **Consider the intensity of the practice.** Successful coaches have a way of knowing when to back off and let players recover. Coaches may not only reduce the intensity of practice but actually let the players play another sport just for fun and light conditioning.



Step 6: Catch Them Doing Good

By recognizing and rewarding appropriate behavior, you reinforce these behaviors, and reinforced behaviors are more likely to occur. So look less for mistakes and look a lot harder for good performance and appropriate behavior, and let your players know that you appreciate these actions. Catching your players doing good and encouraging their efforts motivates them to persist in mastering difficult skills, and they feel it is safe to make mistakes in the process

of learning. In order to use praise and rewards effectively as you catch your players doing good, keep the following in mind.

- Reward the performance, not the outcome.
- Reward athletes more for their effort than for their actual success.
- Reward little things on the way toward reaching larger goals.
- Reward the learning and performance of life skills as well as sport skills.
- Reward athletes only when they have earned it.



Be encouraging!

Coach...
You're the
best!!

Listen!

About the Author

Sport has always been a vital part of **Rainer Martens'** life. He has coached at the youth, high school, and collegiate levels and has studied sport as a research scientist. The founder and president of Human Kinetics, he also started the American Sport Education Program, the largest coaching education program in the United States. An internationally recognized sport psychologist, Martens is the author of more than 80 scholarly articles and 15 books, including *Successful Coaching*, the best-selling coaching book ever published, and *Directing Youth Sport Programs*. He has also been a featured speaker at more than 100 conferences around the world and has conducted more than 150 workshops and clinics for coaches and athletes at all levels.

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